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News Release

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*****Due to circumstances beyond our control, the February council meeting location has been changed. The new location is: Ponce de Leon Conference Resort, 4000 U.S. Highway 1 North, St. Augustine, FL; Telephone: (800) 228-2821. The meeting will be held the week of February 10-14, 1997.**

Council to Finalize Snapper Grouper Amendment 8

The South Atlantic Council is scheduled to finalize Snapper Grouper Amendment 8 at the February meeting.

Council members are currently reviewing comments received from the public during hearings held along the South Atlantic coast between January 6-24. Based on these comments and letters received, the council may choose to make further modifications to proposed management measures in the document before approving it.

This amendment includes measures to reduce the number of federal permits in the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery, as well as other measures aimed at reducing fishing pressure on snapper grouper species, including a three month seasonal closure.

Should the amendment be finalized in February, regulations are expected to be in place later this year.

Council to Set 1997/98 Wreckfish Quotas

The Snapper Grouper Committee will meet with the Wreckfish Advisory Panel at the meeting in February to review the wreckfish assessment, discuss the status of the fishery, and recommend quotas for the 1997/98 fishing season.

The wreckfish fishery is managed under the individual transferable quota system, where only those who hold percentage shares are allowed to participate in the fishery.

The 1995/96 and 1996/97 quotas were set at two million pounds, and the quota was not reached in either year.

Council to Approve BRD Testing Protocol

As follow-up to Amendment 2 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan, which requires the use of bycatch reduction devices in shrimp trawls, the council will finalize the testing protocol for new or modified BRDs in February.

BRDs are trawl modifications which are intended to reduce Spanish mackerel and weakfish bycatch in the shrimp fishery by 40 percent. Currently, the only BRDs tested and approved for use in the South Atlantic EEZ are the large mesh, extended funnel, and fish eyes.

The testing protocol will provide industry with guidelines for creating new, more efficient BRDs, or modifying existing ones. It is designed to minimize testing costs, while ensuring adequate sampling is completed to evaluate the effectiveness of the new gear.

The testing protocol is expected to be final in conjunction with secretarial approval of Amendment 2 in March.

The public is invited and encouraged to attend South Atlantic Fishery Management Council meetings.

All meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the council office.

Council's February Meeting Agenda

**February 10, 1997, 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.—
Shrimp Committee;**

The Shrimp Committee will meet to receive a report on the Scientific and Statistical Committee and Bycatch Reduction Device (BRD) Advisory Panel review of the BRD and proxy analysis by Drs. Shah and Watson. The Committee will also approve the final BRD testing protocol;

February 10, 1997, 6:30 p.m. until all business is complete—Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program Scoping Meeting (ACCSP);

As a partner in the ACCSP, the Council will hold a scoping meeting to solicit public input on ways to improve commercial and recreational fisheries data collection;

**February 11, 1997, 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon —
Joint Controlled Access & Snapper Grouper Committees;**

The Committees will meet to review public hearing comments and letters on Snapper Grouper Amendment 8 and the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS), the NMFS informal review, and the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel's recommendations for the Amendment;

**February 11, 1997, 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.—
Joint Controlled Access and Snapper Grouper Committees;**

The Committees will meet to develop recommendations for finalizing Snapper Grouper Amendment 8;

**February 12, 1997, 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon—
Joint Snapper Grouper Committee and the Wreckfish Advisory Panel;**

The Committee will meet jointly with the Wreckfish Advisory Panel to review the Wreckfish Assessment, discuss the status of the wreckfish fishery, and develop recommendations for the 1997/1998 wreckfish total allowable catch (TAC) and other framework actions;

**February 12, 1997, 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.—
Scientific and Statistical Selection Committee (closed session);**

The Committee will meet in closed session to develop recommendations for appointment of Scientific and Statistical Committee members;

**February 12, 1997, 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.—
Council Session;**

At 3:15 the council will take public comment on the wreckfish TAC and other framework actions and Snapper Grouper Amendment 8, before making a decision on the 1997/1998 wreckfish TAC and other framework actions, and approving Amendment 8 for submission to the Secretary of Commerce;

**February 13, 1997, 8:30 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.—
Council Session;**

From 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon the Council will continue to receive the Controlled Access and Snapper Grouper Committee report;
From 1:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. the Council will meet in closed session to receive the SSC Committee report and appoint SSC members;
From 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. The Council will receive the Shrimp Committee report, take public comment on the BRD testing protocol before approving the protocol;
From 3:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. the Council will receive the Law Enforcement Committee report and address recommendations made by the Committee and Law Enforcement Advisory Panel;
From 3:45 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. the Council will receive a report on the proposed NMFS habitat guidelines before taking action on these guidelines;
From 4:45 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. the Council will receive a report on the proposed NMFS weakfish regulations;
From 5:15 to 5:45 the Council will hear a report on Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program activities;

**February 14, 1997, 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon—
Council Session;**

The Council will receive a report on Harbor Branch research being conducted in the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern; hear the status of Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel catches and Amendment 8 to the Coastal Pelagics Fishery Management Plan (FMP); hear a report on the status of the Golden Crab FMP, implementation of the Plan, and permit review; discuss implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act amendment; hear a report on the NOAA General Counsel penalty schedule meeting; hear a report on planning a workshop for marine reserves; receive agency and liaison reports and discuss other business and upcoming meetings.

Atlantic State and Federal Cooperative Group Seeking Public Input on Fisheries Data Collection

As a partner in the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), the South Atlantic Council is holding a scoping meeting on Monday, February 10 at 6:30 p.m. in St. Augustine, Florida to solicit ideas from the public on ways to improve commercial and recreational fisheries data collection.

The ACCSP is a state-federal cooperative program designed to coordinate and improve data collection activities on the Atlantic coast for recreational and commercial fisheries. Under current data collection programs, fishermen are often required to provide the same information to various agencies by filling out separate data sheets or logbooks. The ultimate goal of the ACCSP is for fishermen to provide the information to one agency, with all other interested agencies receiving the information through the ACCSP data management system.

Improvements will be made in the way data is collected from recreational and commercial fishermen, with emphasis on consistency and accuracy, and also in the timeliness of data collection so the information can be used by fisheries managers. With better data, such as effort, biological, economic, and social information, biologists, economists, and sociologists will be able to more accurately assess the status of marine resources, as well as social and economic impacts of fisheries regulations. Improvements in the accuracy of data used in fisheries management will provide both short-term and long-term benefits to the fishermen.

It is important that the ACCSP be designed not only to meet the needs of fisheries scientists and managers, but also the fishermen who provide the needed information. To make the program successful and effective, it is important fishermen have as much input as possible. It will only work if fishermen understand and accept the data collection program.

This scoping meeting provides the public with an opportunity to provide recommendations pertaining to fisheries data collection in the development of this program. For more information, call the council office at 803-571-4366.



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